

Rocky Mountain National Park

Department of the Interior



Longs Peak

An ascent of Longs Peak (14,259 ft - 4,347 m) provides an exhilarating alpine experience for visitors in good physical condition. Safety precautions should be taken to ensure a safe and enjoyable climb to the highest peak in Rocky Mountain National Park.



NATURAL HAZARDS

Natural hazards, such as the weather, rockslides, and avalanches, cannot be controlled. During your climb of Longs Peak, be aware of potential dangers such as:

Sudden Changes in the Weather

Changes in the weather can occur within a matter of minutes. Storms can be severe any month of the year with lightning, rain, snow, or hail often accompanied by strong winds. At the first sign of a storm, turn back to the safety of lower elevations. It is better to return when conditions are safe than to continue climbing in poor or dangerous conditions.

Rockslides

Steep slopes and rock walls are dangerously unstable on Longs Peak. Do not take shortcuts -- stay on established trails and routes.

Avalanches

During the winter, spring and early summer months, avalanches are common in the Longs Peak area. Some routes cross avalanche paths and runouts. Be alert for signs of an unstable snowpack such as settling or "whomping" sounds. Climbers should carry proper avalanche equipment during winter and spring seasons and consult with park rangers about current avalanche conditions.

PRECAUTIONS

Before climbing, be properly equipped and know your limitations.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when a person's entire body temperature is lowered. It can render a person helpless in minutes, but can be avoided by wearing appropriate clothing and being prepared for sudden changes in the weather. Hypothermia can happen at any time of year.

Dress in layers of wool or synthetic material that retain warmth when wet. Wear sturdy footwear. Carry wind jacket and pants, mittens, and a hat. Carry sufficient water and high energy foods when hiking or climbing.

Altitude (Mountain) Sickness

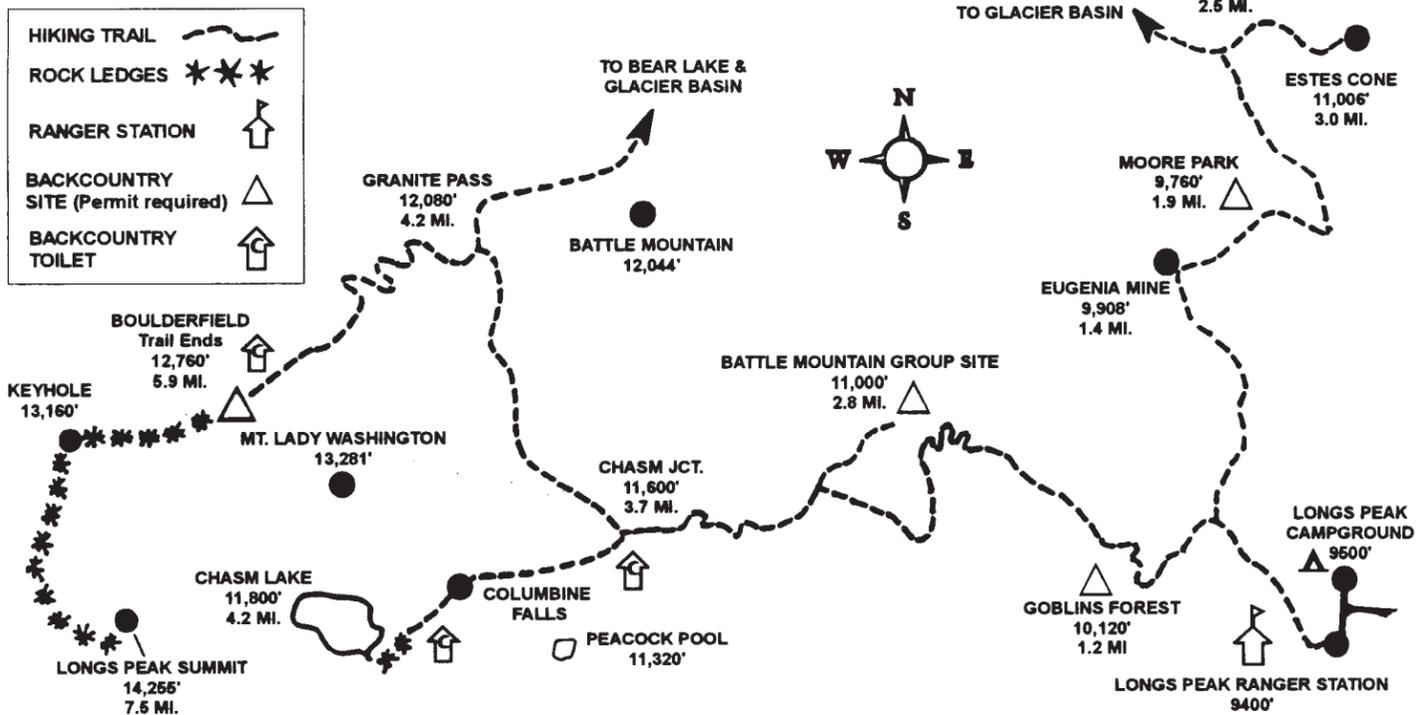
Mountain sickness results from ascending too rapidly at high elevations. Breathing difficulties, nausea, headache, and lethargy are symptoms of mountain sickness. This serious condition is caused by lack of oxygen at higher elevations. The proper remedy is to immediately descend to lower elevations.

Before climbing Longs Peak, acclimate to high mountain elevations. During the ascent, hike at a steady pace broken by frequent rests. Drink lots of water to avoid dehydration. Be alert to the symptoms of mountain sickness. Individuals with heart or respiratory conditions should consult a physician before climbing Longs Peak.

It Is Your Responsibility . . .

Arrange ahead of time for someone to notify the national park if you are overdue!

LONGS PEAK AREA TRAILS



TO THE TOP

Approach

The Longs Peak Ranger Station is one mile off Highway 7, nine miles south of Estes Park, and is open daily during the summer from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Keyhole Route

The only nontechnical climb up Longs Peak (14,259 ft., 4,347 m) is the Keyhole Route. The summit is 7.5 miles (12.1 km) from the ranger station with an elevation gain of 4,854 feet. The six miles to the Boulderfield, where the Keyhole route begins, is a strenuous hiking trail. From the Boulderfield, ascend west to the Keyhole and traverse south across a steep ledge system on the west face. Ascend the "Trough", then traverse another ledge system called the "Narrows." The "Homestretch" is the final scramble to the summit. The route from the Keyhole to the summit is marked with yellow and red bulls-eyes painted on the rock. *Time for the round trip is about 12-15 hours.*

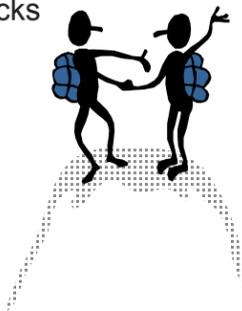
Seasons

From about mid-September until mid-July, Longs Peak is under winter and technical conditions on all routes. In mid-July, August and part of September, the Keyhole Route is generally free of snow and ice and can be negotiated without technical climbing equipment.

Equipment

Be prepared for sudden, drastic weather changes. The following items, as a minimum, should be taken on a one-day summer ascent of Longs Peak:

- sturdy hiking boots
- extra wool sweater or synthetic pile jacket
- long pants
- wind and water resistant jacket and pants
- flashlight
- mittens
- hat
- spare socks
- food
- water



Regulations

Rangers strictly enforce park regulations. You may view a complete list of regulations at any ranger station. Please note these particular regulations:

- Pets are prohibited on trails or anywhere in the backcountry.
- Backcountry campers must have a valid **Backcountry Use Permit**.
- Wood fires are prohibited in the Longs Peak backcountry.
- Feeding wildlife is prohibited.

Camping

Longs Peak frontcountry campground is located near the trailhead and is on a first-come, first-served basis. The 26-site campground is for **TENTS ONLY** with a maximum stay of three nights during the summer season.

Hints for Success

Begin your climb before 3:00 a.m. in order to be off the summit before noon. Afternoon lightning storms are common and can be fatal. If lightning occurs, get off ridges and summits. Conditioning hikes are advised. A slow, steady pace is an important key to success. Sign in at the trail register. Always let a friend or family member know your expected return time.

Backcountry Use Permit

A permit is required for overnight stays at the Boulderfield, Battle Mountain, and Goblins Forest backcountry sites along the Longs Peak Trail. Permits are available from area ranger stations in summer or the backcountry office year round. Reservations may be made by calling 970/586-1242 or writing to: Backcountry Office, Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park CO 80517. **No phone reservations are accepted between May 15 and September 30.** Camping sites are limited. An administrative fee is charged for each backcountry camping permit.